

Office of the California Prison Receivership

Letter from the Receiver, Vol. I, Number 2
5 May 2006

I would like to thank everyone in the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, State Administration and organized labor for the warm welcome they have provided to me in the early days of this endeavor to reform medical care delivery in the state's prison system.

In particular, the Warden and staff of San Quentin were most generous when I toured the facility on my second day on the job, April 18. There, I had the opportunity to see for myself what I had only read about in court documents. It was appalling. I instantly was struck by the dismal physical conditions, overcrowding, disorganization, neglect of the basic equipment and supplies needed for medical care delivery, lack of space and staff, and a host of other problems that add up to bad outcomes for patients.

A few highlights stuck with me. Nurses in the Urgent Care Drop-In Center (TTA), told me they had been waiting four months for a bulk order of 4x4 gauze bandages, with no explanation given them as to why they had not arrived. Outrageous. Upon my instruction, those bandages were delivered the following week. In the X-ray department, staff continues to work with outdated equipment two years after a new X-ray machine was delivered. It remains boxed up on site. Unacceptable. That situation will change, too. Perhaps the most alarming of all was the "clinic" located at the back of a gymnasium where 330 inmates crowd together in bunk after bunk of overflow housing. Those conditions are degrading and unsanitary for both inmate patients, health care professionals and custody staff. They must improve.

It wasn't all bad news, however. I was pleasantly surprised by the good morale and bearing of staff – both health care and custody – who work under these horrid conditions. They were gracious, dedicated and yearning for the chance to do their jobs right. That's just what they're going to get.

The California Prison Receivership is going to put San Quentin under a microscope.

Together, the Receiver's staff and the on-site medical and custody personnel will fix urgent on-the-ground problems – such as the lack of timely delivery and installation of equipment and supplies, the cleanliness of clinical space and the archaic state of medical records and data collection. We also will address the systemic problems such as staffing and space shortages that are slowing the pace of improvements taking place there. As well, the relationships between custody and health care staff will be studied and problems fixed. Neither group can do their jobs in a professional manner without high quality interactions.

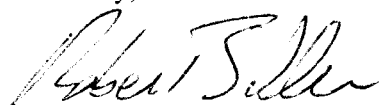
Why San Quentin? Quite simply, it is the oldest, most decrepit and most notorious prison in California. As such, it is a perfect laboratory for reform. What we learn there about how to proceed will inform our efforts in every other prison going forward. Surely, each institution has its own unique features but at the root of this health care crisis are systemic problems in need of repair. We will start at San Quentin as we simultaneously continue to deal with systemic issues such as pharmacy and clinical service contracts.

Stay tuned for progress reports. We plan to start this month by canvassing health care and custody staff about their suggested solutions to the obstacles they confront in delivering constitutionally adequate care. We will then gather a team together in June to prioritize areas and functions for repair, and get started making a difference. I expect that everyone engaged in medical care delivery -- both health care and custody personnel -- in each institution as well as at Headquarters will assume responsibility and accountability for their role in improving the system.

Please remember, all activities of the Receivership have one bottom line in mind: ***To create a system where custody and health care staff together guarantee that access to care and quality of medical services in California prisons meet constitutional standards.***

I look forward to working with you to achieve that goal.

Sincerely,



Robert Sillen
Receiver

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